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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: EUROPEAN DIPLOMATS GIVE HIGH MARKS TO NEW GOT'S FIRST STEPS

REF: A. ANKARA 8586

[1](#)B. ANKARA 8564

[1](#)C. ANKARA 7290

Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter; reasons 1.5 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ankara-based Eurodiplomats say ruling AK Party leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other members of the new GOT have impressed EU leaders with their approach to human rights reform and commitment to EU membership. So far, they say, Erdogan appears willing to break with GOT tradition in order to solve longstanding problems, but is constrained by a conservative bureaucracy. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff met with Ankara-based British, Danish, Italian, Greek, Swedish, Dutch, German and EU Commission diplomats to discuss the new GOT's efforts to promote human rights-related reform and bolster Turkey's EU candidacy prior to the December 12-14 Summit in Copenhagen (reftel A). The diplomats agreed leaders of the ruling AK Party had made a positive impression with their pro-EU statements, planned legislative reform package, and AK leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visits to EU capitals. However, it was not clear to these diplomats whether the GOT's latest efforts will affect the outcome of the Summit; see septel. They asserted that they were advising their capitals to work with the new government, and were reporting that AK leaders appeared willing to break with longstanding policies on human rights. Several noted that Erdogan was more open to new approaches than previous GOT leaders, but was constrained by the more defensive bureaucracy.

[1](#)3. (C) Key observations of the Eurodiplomats include:

-- Greek: According to our contact, Erdogan on his own is open to consider new approaches to Greek-Turkish bilateral issues, but becomes very circumspect when MFA "handlers" are around. During a recent meeting in Ankara, Erdogan spoke freely with Greek diplomats until MFA Deputy U/S Ilkin entered the room, at which point he reverted to "yes" or "no" responses. For this reason, the Greek Embassy recommended that PM Simitis meet one-on-one with Erdogan during his recent visit, which he did, for two and a half hours. Erdogan offered his support for a Cyprus solution in exchange for Greek backing of a date for Turkey to begin EU accession talks; President Sezer, by contrast, only repeats oft-heard warnings against trying to rush a Cyprus agreement. Our contact said the Greek Embassy considers AK easier to work with than more traditional Turkish parties. AK, they believe, is less bound by Kemalist policies and more like a typical European political party with grassroots support. Unlike other party leaders, Erdogan is an opportunist who will take risks if he believes they are in Turkey's interest.

-- UK: A British diplomat said PM Blair also noted that Erdogan was much more flexible than the "scripted" Sezer in recent meetings. Erdogan impressed the British by emphasizing that human rights reform was good for Turkey, regardless of EU membership. The British also appreciated Erdogan's willingness to accept the tacit linkage of EU membership, Cyprus, and ESDP. Erdogan is not yet up to speed on the details of the Cyprus negotiations, but instinctively understands the time is right for a breakthrough.

-- EU: The number-two official at the EU Commission office in Ankara said AK leaders have wisely admitted the shortcomings of past GOT reform efforts. The previous administration stubbornly insisted that the GOT had fully met the EU's Copenhagen political criteria; the new government, by contrast, has highlighted areas where past reforms fell short and has begun preparing solutions. Specifically, GOT officials have indicated they intend to revise recent, highly

restrictive regulations on non-Turkish broadcasting and
minority foundations (reftels B and C.)

DEUTSCH